

Freedom and moral responsibility in Proclus, *Tria opuscula*

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1. Soul powers

Theol. Plat. III 22.12-24.24:

[ὄντα]	A. οὐσία B. ζωή C. νοῦς D. ψυχή	
[γινόμενα]	1. αἱ λογικαὶ ψυχαὶ (λογικὰ ζῶα) [downwards to humans]	participate in A, B, C and D
	2. αἱ γνωστικαὶ δυνάμεις τοῦ ἀλόγου [down to (irrational) animals]	participate in A, B and C
	3. αἱ ὀρεκτικαὶ δυνάμεις τῆς γνωστικῆς ἀμέτοχοι δυνάμει [down to plants]	participate in A and B
	4. ποιότητες καὶ τὰ πάθη πάντα καὶ τῶν σωμάτων τὰ ἔσχατα [down to bodies]	participate in A

Philoponos *In de Anima* 1.6-9.2 (= Ammonius, *apo phônês*):

Δυνάμεις	γνωστικαί	ζωτικαὶ καὶ ὀρεκτικαί
λογικαί	1. νοῦς 2. διάνοια 3. δόξα	1. βούλησις 2. προαίρεσις
ἄλογοι	1. φαντασία (ἔνδον) [παθητικὸς νοῦς] 2. αἴσθησις (πρὸς τὰ ἔξω)	1. θυμός 2. ἐπιθυμία
(παρὰ δὲ ταύτας) αἱ φυτικά		1. θρεπτική 2. αὐξητική 3. γεννητική

Reconstruction of Proclus' views:

Δυνάμεις	γνωστικαί	ζωτικαὶ καὶ ὀρεκτικαί
λογικαί	ἡ νοητική [διάνοια] ἡ δοξαστική	ἡ ἀναγωγὸς ὄρεξις ἡ γενησιουργὸς ὄρεξις
ἄλογοι	ἡ μνημονευτική higher φανταστική lower φανταστική ἡ αἰσθητική	θυμός ἐπιθυμία
φυτικά		θρεπτική αὐξητική [γεννητική] = ἡ ἀνανεάζουσα?

2. De malorum subsistentia

T1 *Mal.* 33: "And because of their weakness such souls suffer what they ought to suffer when they have chosen badly. If, on the other hand, souls are drawn by matter — that is, if we attribute the cause of their generation to the attraction matter exercises upon souls, as something that draws them — where is their self-motion and ability to choose (23: *ubi est le automobile et anime electiones* / ποῦ ἐστὶ τὸ αὐτοκίνητον καὶ αἱ τῆς ψυχῆς αἰρέσεις)? Or how can one explain why among the souls that are generated in matter,

some gaze at intellect and the good, whereas others gaze at generation and matter, if matter draws all of them alike to itself, troubling them and doing violence to them even when they are in the upper regions?"

T2 Mal. 58.16-22: "After all, saying that god is the cause of all things is not the same as saying that he is the only cause of all things. The former statement is correct, the latter is not. For intellect, too, is the cause of all things that are posterior to it, and soul of the things that follow it, and nature of bodies and all things pertaining to bodies. Each of these produces in a different way, the one primordially and unitarily, the other eternally, the next by self-movement and the last through necessity."

T3 Mal. 61.20-23: "For the knowledge of the soul is self-moving, that of intellect is eternal, and that of the gods is ineffable and unitary,"

T4 Cf. in Remp. 2.275.8-19: ἀλλ' ὅπου μὲν τὸ ἀναγκαῖον καθ' ὑπαρξίν ἐστιν ἀναγκαῖον, ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν κρειττόνων ἡμῶν αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως καθ' ἓνα λόγον ζώντων καὶ τάξιν μίαν, ὅπου δὲ κατὰ ἀκολουθίαν, ὡς ἐφ' ἡμῶν· τὸ γὰρ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἄστατον ὃν ἔχει κατὰ τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἀνάγκην, εἰ μὲν τάδε ἐλοίμεθα, ταδὶ πάντως ἀκολουθήσειν, εἰ δὲ τάδε, ταδί. καθάπερ καὶ ἐνταῦθα· τόνδε γὰρ ἐλόμενοι τὸν βίον συνεσόμεθα αὐτῷ ἐξ ἀνάγκης· ἀπλῶς δὲ οὐκ ἐξ ἀνάγκης· ἐνεδέχετο γὰρ καὶ ἄλλον βίον ζῆν, ἀλλὰ πρὸ τῆς αἰρέσεως, μετὰ δὲ τὴν αἴρεσιν ἀδύνατον. καὶ οὕτως ἔοικεν καὶ πᾶν τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον εἰς ἀναγκαίαν μεταπίπτειν δύναμιν διὰ τῆς ἀκολουθίας, καὶ τῶν ἐνδεχομένων ἀναγκαίως ἐνδεχομένοις ἄλλοις ἐπομένων.

3. On Providence

3.1. Theodorus' concept of 'what is up to us'

T5 Prov. 56: "Next you ask what is this faculty that depends on us (*quid le in nobis*), – a question you had better put at the beginning of your arguments, and then raised problems about it. After investigation you define it as that which is by nothing dominated or mastered, but is, as you literally say, self-determined (*autoperigraptum*) and self-activated (*autenergitem*). But if it is of such a nature, it is also absolutely incorruptible and supremely powerful and it belongs only to the first lord of all beings, whereas what depends on us is no longer a characteristic of us."

The concept of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. It is

1. that which is not dominated or mastered
2. αὐτοπερίγραπτον
3. αὐτενέργητον

The inference from his definition. It is

- a. absolutely incorruptible
- b. supremely powerful
- c. hence it can only be attributed to the first god (no longer to 'us'), 'up to him'.

Cf. **T6 Resp.** X, 617e3: ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον (myth of Er). Procl. in Remp. 2.13.7-8: δοκεῖ γὰρ μάχεσθαι τὸ εἰμαρμένον πρὸς τὸ ἀδέσποτον.

T7 in Remp. 2.276.3-7: ἡμεῖς δὲ φήσομεν ἀδέσποτον μὲν εἶναι καὶ τὴν κακίαν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἡμῖν οὖσαν μόνον· ἀδέσποτον δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν μόνον, ἀλλὰ διότι τὴν ψυχὴν ἐλευθέραν ἀποτελεῖ τῶν πικροτάτων δεσποτῶν, οἷς ἡ δουλεύουσα τῶν ἀγαθῶν στέρεται πάντων.

T8 Phaedr. 245c5-9: Ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος. τὸ γὰρ ἀεικίνητον ἀθάνατον· τὸ δ' ἄλλο κινεῖν καὶ ὑπ' ἄλλου κινούμενον, παῦλαν ἔχον κινήσεως, παῦλαν ἔχει ζωῆς. μόνον δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ κινεῖν, ἅτε οὐκ ἀπολείπον ἐαυτό, οὐποτε λήγει κινούμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα κινεῖται τοῦτο πηγὴ καὶ ἀρχὴ κινήσεως.

T9 *Prov.* 56 (cont.): “This definition is far from the concept of ‘what depends on us’ that the ancient philosophers had in mind when they assigned this faculty to human souls. That is my thesis, but it is up to you to check whether what I say is true.”

Proclus’ argument (§ 56-57):

- The ancients distinguish between choice (προαίρεσις) and will (βούλησις) [in 58 he will identify choice and τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν]
- Will is only toward the good.
- Choice is „open to both“ (the good and the bad), and hence appropriate to the nature of soul.
- The corresponding faculty of the soul is called ‘the elective’ (*hanc potentiam ipsius electivam vocaverunt* / προαιρετικήν, Strobel)
- Choice is a rational appetitive faculty
- Choice is not directed at the good alone nor to the apparent good alone, but to both: to the good and to the apparent good (which is in fact bad)

T10 § 58: “To sum up, choice is a rational appetitive faculty that strives for some good, either true or apparent, and leads the soul towards both. Through this faculty the soul ascends and descends, does wrong and does right.”

T11 § 59: “Hence the elective faculty and ‘what depends on us’ seem to be identical. Due to this faculty we differ both from divine and from mortal beings, since neither of them is subject to this ambivalent inclination: divine beings, because of their excellence, are established only among true goods, and mortal beings, because of their deficiency, only among apparent goods. The intellect characterises the former, sense perception the latter; and ‘the intellect is our king, sense perception our messenger’.”

(§ 60)

- “We are dominated by universal causes and receive what we deserve.”
- “Therefore ‘what is up to us’ does not consist in the power and license to do all things.”
- The divine power is unitary, that of the soul dual (ambivalent).
- A willed life (*volita vita*) is in accordance with the good and godlike.

T12 § 61: “It is not by limiting its power within the domain of desirable things inside the souls, that you have made the elective soul such as it is, but by giving it the power also over what does not depend on us. For what is outside the soul does not depend on us. Therefore, our life is a mixture of what does not depend on us and what depends on us.”

Chs. 62-5: divine providence does not exclude human freedom.

T13 *Prov.* 65: “Therefore, it is not true that, if the gods know the future, its outcome is by necessity fixed, but one should attribute to the future an undetermined outcome from what is determined, and to the gods a determinate foreknowledge of what is undetermined.”

Rivalling views:

- Everything is necessitated (Stoics)
- God does not know everything in a determinate manner (Peripatetics)

T14 *Prov.* 65: “We conclude: the gods know what depends on us in a divine and timeless manner and yet we act according to our nature. And whatever we choose is foreknown by them, not because of a determination in us, but of one in them.”

3.2. Theodorus' challenge

§ 2:

- The demiurge of the world is immanent.
- Demiurge = fate ≈ providence
- Fate is the connection and ordered sequence of events.
- All events are directed with inescapable necessity.
- Only fate/providence is αὐτεξούσιος (self-determining)
- The self-determination traditionally ascribed to humans is not real.
- The soul and its decisions are mere parts in the concatenation of events.
- The concatenation is mechanic, the universe is one big machine.
- [cf. § 3: fate is the connected sequence, providence the necessity causing this sequence]

T15 “[...] you supposed that this dramaturgy is directed merely by some kind of unalterable necessity; and the latter you celebrate as providence, considering it the only self-determining power (*autexousion*) and mistress of all things, whereas the self-determination of the human soul, about which there is so much talk, is in your opinion only a name and nothing in reality. For the soul is situated in the world and subservient to the actions of other things and is a part of the functioning of the cosmos. Rather, to use your own words, the inescapable cause, which moves all things that this cosmos ‘comprehends within itself’ (*Tim.* 30c8), is ‘mechanic’ (*mechanica facientem* / μηχανοποιόν, Strobel), and the universe is, as it were, one machine (*mechanemate autem uno quasi ente universo* / μηχανήματος δὲ ἑνὸς ὡς ὄντος τοῦ παντός), wherein the celestial spheres are analogous to the interlocking wheels (*tympanis implicatis* / ἐμπεπλεγμένοις τυμπάνοις) and the particular beings, the animals and the souls, are like the things moved by the wheels, and everything depends upon one moving principle.”

3.3. Proclus' reply. Preliminary distinctions, based on common notions

1. providence ≠ fate; providence precedes fate
2. the rational soul ≠ the irrational soul; the first is separable from body, the second is not.
3. knowledge ≠ truth

T16 § 4: The rational soul has self-determination (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον) and that which depends on us (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν), body and the irrational soul are subjected to necessity, i.e. to fate.

These two souls are interwoven. As a result, the irrational life participates in a ‘likeness of choice’ (μετέχει τινὸς εἰδώλου τῆς προαιρέσεως), the rational soul dims self-determination under the influence of the irrational.

T17 § 9: “As there are beings that are eternal in both respects [se. in substance and in activities] and beings that need time in both respects, there must also be some intermediary realm [...]. The only remaining possibility is to make the intermediary eternal in substance, temporal in activity. Thus, we have pointed out to you the three orders of beings, which we call intellectual, psychic, and corporeal.”

T18 § 10: “According, then, to our common notion of ‘fate, events that are ordered under fate are those that are interconnected; and according to the generally accepted understanding of ‘connection’, interconnected things are divided, dissociated either in place or time, though capable of being connected by another cause. Such things are moved by another and are corporeal. For things existing outside of bodies are either

superior to both place and time [sc. intellect] or, if they have activities in time, seem at least not to occupy space [sc. soul]. From all these premises the conclusion is evident: things governed and connected by fate must be things moved by an external cause and totally corporeal."

Definition of 'fate', **T19 § 12**: "Thus we have discovered the meaning of fate and how it is the nature of this world, an incorporeal substance, as the patron of bodies, and life as well as substance, since it moves bodies from the inside and not from the outside, moving everything according to time and connecting the movements of all things that are dissociated in time and place. According to fate mortal beings are also connected with eternal beings and are set in rotation together with them, and all are in mutual sympathy. Also nature in us binds together all the parts of our body and connects their interaction, and this nature can also be viewed as a kind of 'fate' of our body."

T20 § 13: "There is no choice in bodies. Hence you might say that necessity and the absence of choice is a characteristic of bodies, but not something better than bodies. For even what moves in a circle, moves of necessity in this way, since it has a nature capable of a circular movement, just as fire moves to the circumference and earth to the centre. Thus Plato set necessity to preside over the coming to be of bodies, and hence also over their passing away."

T21 § 15: "Therefore, the soul that can act separately from the body must also have an existence separable from the body."

- Affections (*epithymia* and *thymos*) and perceptions have their natural activity together with the body (§ 16)
- The rational soul *can* free itself from the irrational: "In all such activities, the rational soul shows that it disdains all irrational motions, both cognitive and appetitive, and liberates itself from them as though they were alien. [...] Hence, it is clear that the soul acting in that way manifestly dissociates itself from sense perceptions, which it condemns, and from the pleasure and pain, which it eliminates." (§ 17)

Cf. **T22 § 44**: "[T]he other kind of life must be intellectual according to its nature and it cannot bear to follow the violent affections of sense perception. It contains in itself the criteria for discerning deceitful motions from outside; it adds that which is lacking in that which sense perception experiences and refutes what is untrue in them, and it does all this from within. For perception cannot be judged with the data of perception, but only with intellectual reasons, which sense perception is unable to receive. In fact, the intellectual life must be opposed to sense perception, as it is immaterial, separate and self-activating (*immaterialem et separabilem et ex se operativum* / ἄλλον καὶ χωριστὴν καὶ αὐτοενέργητον). To this life we must attribute choice, which may tend to both sides, upwards and downwards"

Lives of the soul, **T23 § 20**: "[...] when the soul acts according to its nature, it is superior to the condition of being led by fate; but when it is brought down to sense perception and made irrational and corporeal, it goes along with the things below, lives together with them as with some drunken neighbours, and it is dominated by the cause that reigns over them. For there must exist also such a class of beings that are in their substance above fate, but are sometimes placed under fate through relation."

Virtue is free, **T24 § 23**: "For virtue alone is free and 'without a master' and 'fitting for a free man', truly the power of the soul, and he who possesses it is a master."

T25 § 24: "Every soul, then, has a share in the state of freedom insofar as it has a share of virtue. And insofar as it has a share of vice and weakness, it also has a share in the state of being enslaved to others, and not only to fate, but, so to speak, to all those

factors that are capable of giving the object of their desire to those who want it, or are capable of taking it away.”

T26 § 25: “Further, if the intellect and god are prior to the soul and after the soul come affections and bodies, and if it is a property of the latter to act in a necessitated manner and of the intellect and god to act in a manner superior to all necessity and to be solely free, then the soul [will be in different states depending upon] whether it sides with the latter or the former: it will either take on the necessity of inferior things or put forward the freedom of the superior, and it will be subservient, either ruled from above or from below, and, while a slave, will either reign together with its masters or be a slave together with those who are only slaves.”

T27 § 26: “When, then, you want to see what depends on us, look at the soul that lives in accordance with nature. The soul that lives in accordance with nature is that which is not infirm.”

3.4. Proclus’ reply to concrete objections

Causes for the events that result from our actions at different levels:

1. The god from whom comes the good for all.
2. The periodic revolution of the world, the governance of the world.
3. Humans

T28 § 34: “They [sc. truly wise people] consider themselves to be a third cause whenever they obtain something after making choices and contribute by their own impulses to the accomplishment of what is to be done. But whenever something occurs contrary to their choice, only then do they rightly impute the responsibility to the whole and to its action as being overwhelming. This is because particular things must everywhere act together with the whole, whereas the whole can act both with and without the particulars. [...] Therefore, even if we succeed, we must attribute responsibility to the decisive moment of fate and to god, in order that what happens may have three causes. The first is that which makes it good, the second that which makes it fixed into a single conformity with the universe, the third is the purely human factor. For every human deed is a part of the universe, but not *vice versa*.”

T29 § 35: “Where, then, must we situate in this context that which depends on us, when what happens is connected with the periodic revolution of the world, or again, when it comes about due to that cause alone? Where else, then, shall we say, but in our own interior choices and impulses? We ourselves are masters only of these, whereas we share control over external events with many other causes, which are more powerful. This is because what happens outside ourselves must take place as a part of the universe in order for it to happen at all. It happens when the universe joins in assenting to it and collaborates with it, so that the universe may act upon itself, acting with a part of itself on another and undergoing influence from another part.”

Cf. **T30 § 55:** “Did we not agree that what depends on us is not a force ruling over external events, but only collaborating with them? If so, it is reasonable that it arranges what is internal according to its power, but not what is external, since it also needs other factors not within its power to dispose those things. I myself, when I consider these problems, have great admiration for the noble Epictetus who often exhorts us not to confuse what depends on us with what does not depend on us, and not to be in such a state with regard to things that do not depend on us so as to believe they ought absolutely to occur.”

T31 § 35: “And however we may qualify the events that take place, we do not say that the universe has this [moral] character, but the person who acts. This is because the

[moral] quality in what happens did not come from the world, but from the life of the acting person."

T32 § 36: "However, the faculty that depends on us is not only a capacity for acting but also a capacity of choice, choosing to act <either> on it self or together with other factors. And it is because of its choice that we say that it makes failures and acts rightly, since even if the result is good, but the agent acts on the basis of an evil choice, we say that the action is bad. For, what is good in what is done is due to a [favourable] external factor, but what is bad is due to the choice of the agent. Thus it is evident to all that we are masters of our actions to the extent that they are deliberately chosen."

→ The argument from divination

→ Misfortunes of good people

4. Decem dubitationes circa providentiam

T33 § 35: Dub. 39: "Furthermore, of all the things we possess some we have through our soul's capacity for self-determination (*to autexousion*), others because we suffer from other people, still others through the sole agency of the universe. For the things then of which we ourselves are master by acting on our own, we have only ourselves to blame. 'For the responsibility', as he [Plato] says, 'is with the person who chooses' (*Resp. X*, 617E4: *aitia helomenou*), whether it is illness or poverty someone owes to himself. Providence is not to be blamed (617E5: *theos anaitios*). For we do not say that providence, which has brought about the capacity of free choice rules in the universe for the sake of the abolishment of this freedom, but as preserving its coming about. As for the things done to us by others, though we may unjustly suffer, [we should consider that] the law of the universe allows parts to act on each other according to their own inclinations."

5. Editions and translations:

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